DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 609 TM 002 589

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TITLE The Practicum: A Department in Development Training.
PUB DATE 1 Mar 73
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, Louisiana, February 25 - March 1, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Development; Educational Objectives; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; Models; *Practicums; Practicum Supervision; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

A brief history of the UCLA Practicum for Educational Developers is given as are the goals of the practicum and some of the obstacles in its path. The practicum seeks to train development personnel in the context of real development tasks, requires proven competence, is a team effort, and is based on the assumption that novices need assistance and feedback. All projects are group produced and designed to help prepare technical and professional staff competent in instructional development. Areas of continuing concern are discussed. (RS)

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ED 076609

Paper Presented at a Symposium of the
Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
New Orleans, Louisiana
February 25 - March 1, 1973

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The Practicum: A Departure in Development Training

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TM 002 589

The Practicum for Educational Developers was designed to assist in the preparation of technical and professional staff competent in the area of instructional development. A test of some of the assumptions undergirding the project is the first order of business.

Is there a need for training?

Man or person-power studies notwithstanding, a need for training models was discerned to exist. The basis for that need related to the irrelevance of existing training housed in Departments of Education and the reported delay in productivity of newly hired staff at development agencies.

Training in the past had been focused at the University level, augmented by relatively unstructured internship experiences. The deficiencies in that pattern, at UCLA, were manifold. The coursework in development was information and micro-skill oriented. The courses were characterized by the typical University encumbrances: scheduled meetings, individual assignments, grades, position papers, a one-quarter (ten week) time frame and a single instructor. The internship experience was often traumatic. When on-site development didn't proceed in a single-file and when practicing development personnel made serious "mistakes" according to classroom dogma, trainees were confused and alienated. Equally impor-

tant, internship often did not permit the trainee to be trained. Rather he or she was given a particular, and often limited, task and encouraged to hone skill in that job role. Thus, interns who showed early propensity for a lesson writing (or item writing, teacher training, etc.) continued in only one area. Lateral mobility was not often possible, inhibited by the impatience of the sponsoring agencies in meeting their own development requirements.

Because there were (and are) few development oriented graduate programs in existence, agencies with a development mission and staffing needs hired staff prepared in the usual academic setting. A difficulty with research-oriented training experience can be summarized in the "Solomon Four-Group Syndrome" exhibited by many new-hires in development agencies and surviving with truly amazing stamina a variety of extinction procedures attempted. Despite scheduling requirements and other nasty exigencies, research-trained developers persisted in wanting to engage in research rather than development, in fact, in disguising their development activity as research. The more maleable new staff were eventually taught the joy of design solutions but not without great pain. The less maleable both suffered and engendered somewhat more discomfort.

The Practicum seeks to train development personnel in a way that may bridge the unfortunate chasm between previous university programs and real development needs. The Practicum is an idea comprised of four main assumptions:

1. Development training is best conducted in the context of a real rather than artificial development task.
2. Development training requires the provision of competencies, many of which can be taught.

3. Development is largely a team rather than an individual effort.

4. Novices need more assistance and feedback than one instructor can provide.

The Practicum training model relates to each of these points.

1. Tasks for trainees are real, not simulated. Development is modestly supported by agencies external to the Practicum, and products designed by trainees must meet the needs of these sponsors. Thus, activity is placed on a time-line, with schedules for tryouts required well in advance. Publishing rights are shared equally by the development team and the funding group.

2. Enabling the trainees to be able to engage skillfully in development tasks requires instruction related to a set of competencies, with a student-monitoring system. While the project was not originally designed to engage in extensive materials development, more rather than fewer structured materials have been necessary to build competencies.

3. Trainees work in groups to complete their development project. The group is provided some management guidelines for organizing their activity. All products are group rather than individually prepared.

4. Each development project is both identical and vastly different from previous experience. It is identical because the same issues and problems recur with unoriginal regularity:

Is this project worth our effort?

How much specification should be planned?

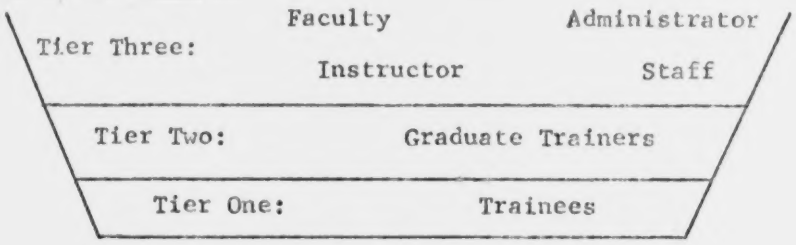
How can we make the instruction replicable and interesting?

How can we finish?

Etc.

The projects are different, of course, because the questions are raised in

unique contexts on varying schedules. Throughout the uncertainty of development, trainees value assistance in dealing with these questions. The Practicum was initially designed so that each trainee team (from two to five individuals) would have a mentor assigned to them. This person, a graduate student trainer, was intended to assist the team when they felt stymied and to critique their work as it was submitted. The Practicum structure was to be implemented as follows:



Faculty would be responsible for the broad design of the project. The project administrator and his staff were to supply materials and resources requisite for the instructor conducting training. Tier Two assistants were to be assigned to and monitor trainee groups. Following successful training, Tier Three trainees could move up to Tier Two trainer positions. A description of actual activity in the Practicum should be referenced against this original instructional structure.

History

Funded in June, 1972, the Practicum* began its work in design of the training experience during the summer. Five major content areas were delineated and ordered tasks and resources were assembled for each. These content areas were 1) Management; 2) Specification; 3) Measures; 4) Empirical Data Procedures; 5) Instructional Design and Development.

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*Practicum staff are Evan Keislar, James Popham, Richard McCann, Merlin Wittrock, and Eva Baker. Graduate Assistants are Peter Leung, Lou Orsan, Judy Safford, and Samellyn Wood.

October - December, 1972:

The initial prototype trial of the Practicum was scheduled for Fall, 1972. Although the Practicum is ultimately intended for use by groups other than graduate students in education, the first tryout was viewed by an exploratory walk-through with students about whom we had the most information: UCLA graduates. We intended (and intend) to reach out to more diverse (difficult) groups when we were confident that we had something to offer.

The fall field trial was plagued from the outset with difficulty. Although intended as an off-campus facility, the Practicum became enmeshed in lease enigmas and was forced to operate in a regular University classroom during the first month of training. This fact deprived the trainees of a locus for their development activity and unfortunately gave the publicity about our "new departure" from usual training an apparition-like quality.

A second source of problems was the development projects themselves. The UCLA Teacher Education Laboratory agreed to sponsor the initial round of materials development activity. In addition to reimbursement for expenses incurred in development and the provision of ready field test subject groups (no small concession in this line of work), faculty members from the Graduate School of Education served as "expert" consultants to the teams. Topics for development included 1) Inquiry Models for Instruction; 2) Developmental Sequence for Emotionally Handicapped Children; 3) Social Dynamics for Teachers; and 4) Evaluating Curriculum Materials. On a trial basis the Teacher Education Laboratory had already supported modules to teach teachers instructional techniques for word defining skills and to develop inquiry lessons in mathematics.

Constraints for products set up by the Teacher Education Laboratory were few:

1) Modules needed to be completed within a one to two hour instructional period.

2) They were to require little maintenance.

3) They were to be on topics potentially useful to pre-service or in-service teachers of either elementary or secondary students.

The Practicum staff added the following specifications:

1) The products were to be related to a task which demanded more than recall or recognition behavior from the subjects.

2) All major decisions were to be empirically verified.

3) A technical report detailing the development tasks (as taught in the Practicum trainee manuals) was required of each team. A prototype, a plan for an alternative prototype, specifications, a pilot test and a technical report, which included revision plans, were required at the end of the ten week span.

One major difficulty experienced by the trainees involved their ability to draw out from their faculty sponsors the desired outcomes of instruction. This state of affairs was exacerbated by the fact that graduate level trainers (Tier Two) were not available for each team. Only one qualified trainer was involved in the fall trial. Thus, the teams were not monitored well regarding their time and devoted disproportionate resources to the specification area.

Certain instructional exercises were inadvertently perpetrated by the Practicum staff itself. For instance, development activity was treated chronologically. Specification skills were taught before the Measures area which in turn preceded the topic of Instructional Design. While this sequence may represent an ideal, if unrealistically neat development sequence, instructionally the order had little to recommend it. In terms of difficulty, for example, the specification task must rank first. We treated this area at the outset. Motivationally, instructional design is likely to be high;

for in this area the trainee can be inventive and unconstrained. The trainee is also doing what development seems to be about when design tasks are confronted. In our wisdom, we treated the design and development area last.

Another point of difficulty lay in the competency provision aspect of instruction. For each task in development, the trainee was presented with an annotated set of resources and was encouraged to probe the area independently. The Practicum materials did not firmly prescribe resources; rather it presented a relevant array, keyed to critical development tasks, from which the trainee was expected to select those most pertinent. For guidance, a self-evaluation questionnaire was used. Whether because of previous history in school settings, general truculence or gross timidity, our trainees engaged in very spotty use of the resources available. Frequently they reported that they had read or worked through materials but at a point too late for them to use the skills required for the project.

The penchant for evaluation of our own activity was another flaw, if our trainees comments are reliable. We asked them to complete a frustrating competency test (most did poorly), a set of too-long questionnaires, items administered for our external evaluation team, a competency related quiz, a short final plus a questionnaire on attitudes. These errors occurred because we were hurried, and as in most development projects the schedule requirements clouded our view. Surely we know better.

An additional, unexpected concern surrounds the question of verisimilitude in training. One might speculate that too much realism is not desirable early in career training, for almost all job related activities have some onerous elements to them. The majority of our students were in their first quarter of work at UCLA. They were placed in a real development

situation, a messy problem to be solved in real-time. The experience was not particularly reinforcing. Trainees needed help in group processes so that they could make their team work productively. They needed to interface with sponsors who may have only imperfectly understood the nature of the trainees' tasks. The trainees were expected to manage not only the effort expended on the development task, but their own acquisition of prerequisite competencies as well.

Introducing a set of foreign experiences, all at once, in the name of realism is an instructionally dangerous move, particularly with novice groups who have built no unswerving commitment to the enterprise. If some development activities are less satisfying, perhaps their introduction should be deferred until the student has developed strong identification with development.

January - April, 1973:

The Practicum continues. Students are revising and subjecting to field trial materials in which a sustained interest has been demonstrated. The materials, though heavily criticized by Practicum staff, are meeting with some success in the larger world. The module on Social Dynamics has been integrated into the UCLA M.Ed. program for teachers. The module on Evaluation of Instructional Materials has unearthed an interested publisher. The materials on the Developmental Sequence for Emotionally Handicapped children have been revised and are being field tested. They will then be incorporated into the Teacher Education program. Trainees are also embarking on new projects concurrent with their continuing work on the old. Projects under development in the Winter quarter are 1) Individualizing Classroom Activity, sponsored by the Teacher Education Laboratory; 2) Training Therapists to Conduct Parent Training Classes, sponsored by a project

of the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute; 3) Changing Attitudes toward Criterion-referenced Tests, sponsored by the Instructional Objectives Exchange. Furthermore, two teams are engaging in parallel development of group processes materials, sponsored by the Practicum for potential incorporation in its programs.

Near future: April - August, 1973

An important tryout is scheduled in the Spring. The trial is critical for the following reasons:

1) A non-UCLA instructor will conduct the Practicum.

2) The Practicum, because is will be offered through University Extension, will attract a different type of trainee than previously experienced.

3) Graduate student trainers will be available to monitor groups.

4) A fully revised instructional sequence will be tested.

The expansion of the trainee group is essential for our training model, although we are frightfully dependent upon voluntarism of the prospective students. Similarly, the ability for another instructor to manage the Practicum activity will be preliminarily assessed. Graduate trainer participation will enable our staff to develop prototype materials for use by other such trainers. The revision of the instructional sequence was dramatic: competency assessment and resource use will be prescribed and scheduled over essential content. Training will begin with simulations designed to provide an overview of the development process, emphasizing the design and field test areas. Only near the close of instruction will the trainees confront the specter of specifications.

A late summer trial on a similar trainee group is planned, again with a non-faculty instructor.

Long-time plans: September - December, 1973

Sections of the Practicum will be refined and repackaged as technical workshops, focusing on the Design-Development area, the Specification-Measures area or the Empirical Tryout topic. A coordinate materials development project on the topic of field trial and revision provisions (tested in segment at AERA, 1973) will be completed in the fall.

Areas of continuing concern

1. Will the training replicate?

Some information will be available on the question of replication following the spring and summer trials. Although a distant-site replication was originally proposed, it was deleted from the final contract. How much of the structure can be duplicated at hospitable sites is at this point speculation. Perhaps our only choice is to demonstrate the successful training of this type happened once, somewhere.

2. Self-sustaining agency?

One original intention of the Practicum designers was to develop an agency capable of sustaining itself fianacially, following the expiration of our Federal contract. Until we had trained a set of competent beginning developers and assembled a cadre of trainers to supervise group work, we could not even begin to think about soliciting development jobs. Attempts will be made to explore the viability of putting the Practicum on a revenue-producing basis in the future, but questions, such as the willingness of trainers to participate, the cost of overhead for the Practicum facility, and the limited capability for long term projects must be answered.

3. Who are we training?

"Who is the developer? What is she that all the swains commend her?" (Considerably after Shakespeare.)

An eminent colleague, Richard E. Schutz, has written on the conduct of development in education (1972) and his remarks concerning development personnel are most interesting. Schutz challenges the functional existence of a class called "developers." According to Schutz development requires a team of specialists with disciplinary identification rather than a specific alliance to development. Thus, while there are workers engaged in development, no being is worthy or damned to be labeled "developer." If semantic assignations were all that were at stake, then there would be little point in raising this issue here. Schutz contends and we agree that elaborate development training programs are not requisite to prepare graduates for development work because of the accelerated rate of change in the procedures and substance of development. Schutz grudgingly concedes that "courses, are perhaps reasonable..." but he is by no means satisfied with University development people trained in research. He asserts that "attitudes inculcated by academic training that forward research contributions...impede development contributions." (Page 39.) As a remedy Schutz suggests on-the-job training or internships, activities which have lacked efficiency in the past. Although such measures may be suitable for the development agency to use, they may exact unreasonable costs from individuals who did not understand what development was about and who did not "work out" in that activity. Particularly for a goal as important as a refocus in orientation from research to development, requiring important attitude changes, one would have to suggest either highly structured internships, of the type described by Dr. Banathy, or a concentrated immersion program such as the Practicum will ultimately offer. Thus, it is easy to dismiss Schutz's disavowel of the need for a "developer," if by that term we mean someone with an understanding of the process from both substantive and management aspects who

can orchestrate development programs. If individuals could be encouraged to shed the prestigious comforts of disciplinary affiliation and describe themselves as "developers," perhaps fewer painful rites of passage would be necessary. The Practicum training program intends to produce individuals who understand the ethos of development, including the need to make quick decisions, to work in complex systems, and to be both early and never finished with difficult tasks.

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Banathy, Bela H. "The Far West R&D Training Consortium." Paper presented at a Symposium of the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, February 25-March 1, 1973.

Schutz, Richard E. "The Conduct of Development in Education." Unpublished manuscript, 42 pp.